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NOTES AND REVIEWS

The Old Freedom. By FRANCIS NEILSON. New York, B. W. Huebsch, 1919. 176 pp.

That we are in a period of social excitation leading to a flood of proposals and counterproposals for social regeneration is patent. Particular social "problems" still press for solution on every hand, but the striking feature of the day is the vast amount of discussion of plans for revolutionary changes. Socialism and syndicalism in their varied forms have occupied the center of the stage, but here is a book that revives the utopia of Henry George. The solution of current unrest is to be found in a return to "the old freedom." This, in a word, is the freedom enjoyed by Englishmen in the ancient days when every man had free access to the soil, was fully his own master, and governed himself through "the holdings of freemen clustered around a moot-hill or sacred tree." This was "a true democracy founded on economic principles."

The best parts of the book are the earlier chapters in which the author traces the rise of the feudal state in England, the gradual subjection of freemen and the annihilation of the yeomanry by restrictive legislation and the enclosure of the common lands. He suits his economic history to his purpose by almost complete silence regarding those fundamental changes which marked the Industrial Revolution. Or does he mean to imply that the system of enclosures resulting in "deserted villages" and a degraded peasantry was responsible for the invention of the steam engine and the power loom? If so, the thesis of the book would seem to be: we could have avoided all our present troubles if we had not developed modern industrialism but had remained in the era of simple agriculture.

After several chapters dealing with Syndicalism, the American Spencerians (Lodge, Root, Taft, etc.), Socialism, Fabianism, Municipalization and Nationalization, all of which contain many interesting and acute observations but seem to lead nowhere, the author has succeeded in creating in the reader a doubtful state of mind—he (the reader) hardly knows whether to look forward to a fiasco or to arouse himself with a great expectation. After reading the next and all but final chapter on "Definitions" which

have no stated bearing on what went before or what is to follow, the former state of mind rapidly gains the ascendancy. Indeed the entire connected statement of the author's positive proposition is contained on part of one page (171) and consists of a proposal for a "tax on the full monopoly value of land." Even here there is no proof but only assertion that this would restore competition, raise wages, "lower the cost of commodities, and remove the irregularities in the distribution of wealth."

This is not to say that there are not many piece-meal arguments throughout the book. Perhaps one might construct the author's meaning in some such form as this: with the expropriation of the soil and the introduction of Feudalism government became as Spencer called it "organized aggression" or, as Oppenheimer calls it, the organization of the political means for the purpose of exploiting economic resources and the working classes; natural rights tended to disappear for they can be maintained only in a society of democratic freeholders; the state abrogated rights and extended privileges; we are thus brought to a condition where the ideals of the natural and equal rights individualists are set at naught and confronted by a Socialist state to be introduced by a proletarian revolution; but this condition of state ownership and compulsion will be worse than the present semi-slavery in that it will constitute a further denial of natural rights; for, the policies of state and municipal ownership, already practiced on a large scale, have not altered capitalism noticeably nor raised the status of labor. How, then, is the laborer to win back this economic freedom? The answer (137) is obvious: "By forcing land into use through the taxation of the value of land."

Written by an English publicist this proposal would seem more applicable to English than to American conditions. No doubt we, too, suffer much from land monopoly, but one cannot overlook the fact that we have 4,000,000 farms operated by their owners. We no doubt need a more thorough policy of conservation; we need to break the monopolies of natural resources; and especially do we need to secure for social uses the socially created unearned increment of both land and capital. We have not only permitted certain favored individuals to levy an annual tax upon us through their monopolistic control of some of nature's richest gifts (e.g., coal) but we have given away billions in public utility franchises (creating new monopolies) the returns from which have too often been used to control legislatures and debauch city governments.

Our author would seem to see our perplexities in an all too simple

light. No doubt his picture of a return to the soil, of a vast multiplication of little homesteads with garden, cow, chickens and pigs, has its beauties in this day of exorbitant prices and popular frivolity. But is it not merely a utopian dream? So far as prices are concerned we need most of all an attack on the distributive system which trebles and quadruples prices between farmer and housekeeper. More important also than free land are capitalist monopolies, governmental incompetency, popular ignorance, and unsocialized conscience. We have an abundance of free land in New York, Pennsylvania, and New England; some of it for sale at prices that would not build the improvements on it. But the "back to the country movement" is slow in getting headway. The attractions of the city with its glitter, ephemeral luxuries and convenient vices prove irresistible. For centuries the country has been the seed-bed of the city, when will this current flow backwards? Not, indeed, as soon as the economic advantages of the country overcome the short hours, wages, and housing conveniences of the city. But when, in addition, there has been overcome the subtle satisfactions of the gregarious instinct and the varied nerve stimuli which makes one feel that he lives more—even if not longer—in the city. For, is it not idle to dream of an era when a people that through centuries has become biologically adapted to civilization will yearn for the simple life of the "old freedom?"

F. H. HANKINS.

World-Power and Evolution. By ELLSWORTH HUNTINGTON. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919. 287 pp.

Every study from the original mind of the Research Associate in Geography in Yale University is certain to be interesting and stimulating. There is a breadth of view and sweep of scientific imagination in the present work that at times makes one fairly catch his mental breath. From the very opening pages one is taken on a voyage of discovery and exploration that does not for a moment lose its enchanting and breathless interest up to the close of the sixth appendix. To some extent to be sure the author draws upon his previous books and articles so that all is not new, but as a theory of biological and social evolution this book easily outranks any previous one by Professor Huntington. After careful reading of the evidence here gathered one is quite ready to assent to the author's statement that "One of the most interesting phases of the historical studies of the next generation is bound to be the conflict of opinion as to the effect of climatic changes upon history" (p. 241).